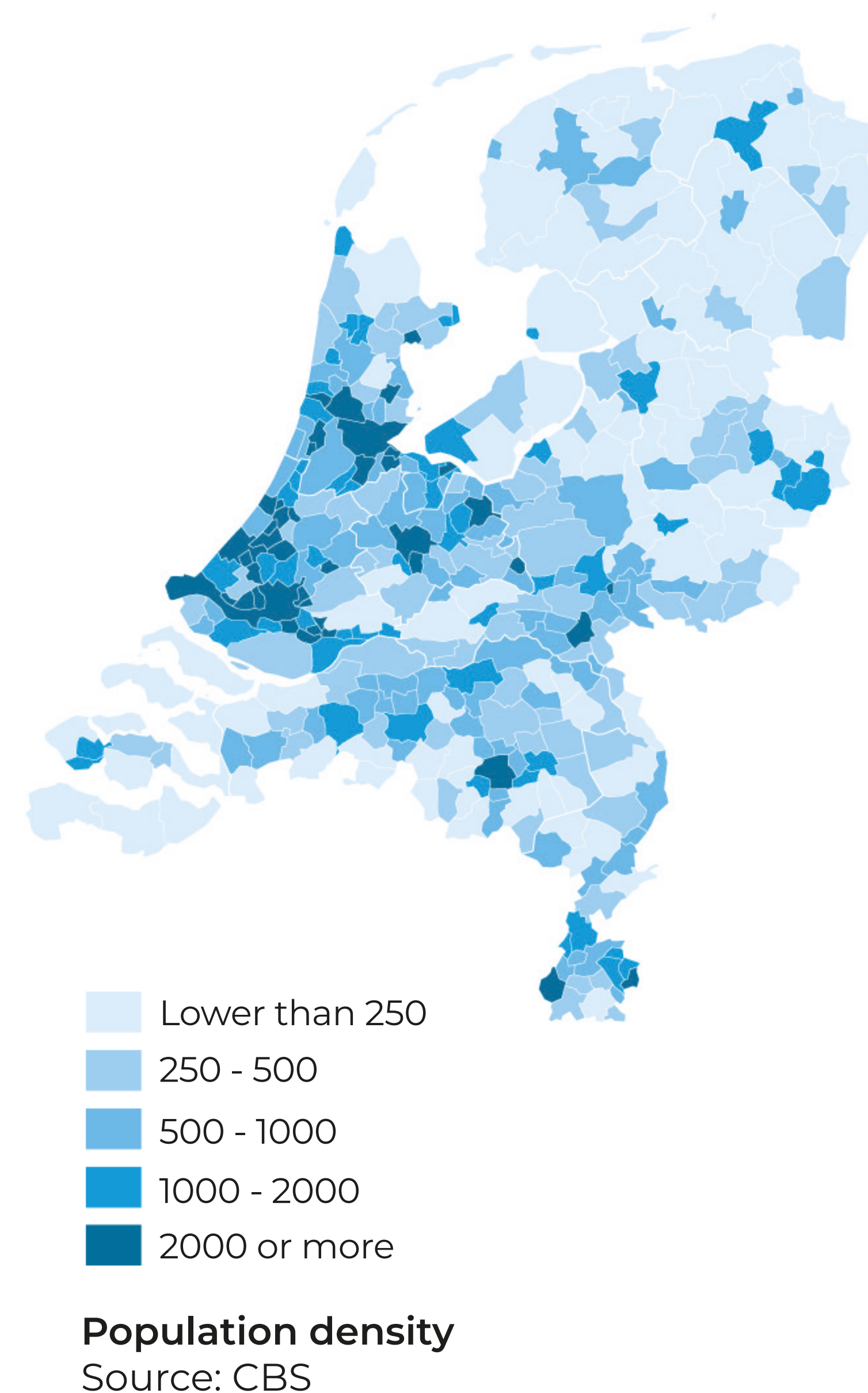


# LIVING LAB NETHERLANDS



The Netherlands is one of the most urbanised countries in the European Union with a population density of 523/km<sup>2</sup>. In 2015, however, about half of the surface area was used for agriculture, while about a third was for nature, water or used for recreation. Urban expansion threatens rural areas' future while offering opportunities for new business models, among others, through various green, recreational and ecological services. At the same time, there is ongoing discussion about the need for agricultural production models to comply with environmental regulations. Women play an important role in agriculture and rural society but are less visible compared to men, particularly in agriculture.

About 25% of farm women co-manage the farm with their partner or parent but are usually not co-owners of the land. They are generally less well represented in the interests of organisations or committees engaged in sectoral and regional policy-making. Rural women are generally engaged in paid labour and many voluntary activities. How many of them are entrepreneurially active is impossible to establish given the significant lack of data to confirm the position of women in agricultural or rural areas. Currently, we are discussing with the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food about the collection of more gender-segregated data.



**The Dutch Living Lab has a threefold aim. It seeks to support women in their development as innovators and entrepreneurs; to contribute to a more inclusive and gender-sensitive innovation support system together with the women innovators and relevant representatives of the current support system, including national and regional policies; and, to promote the recognition of women innovators and their inclusion in the mainstream interest of organisations that represent farmers (the Dutch farm union) and rural residents (Dutch village association).**

Supporting women innovators is vital for the sake of gender equality but also because women have an essential role in developing a sustainable and future-proof agricultural sector and promoting the vitality of rural

areas. In the Netherlands, farm women are often interested in connecting the world of farmers and other citizens and building bridges through their new business activities. This is particularly important in an urbanised country such as the Netherlands, where citizens have lost contact with agriculture, and recent debates about nitrogen emissions have divided society.



In order to provide support to rural women leading or engaged in innovative and entrepreneurial activities in rural areas, **several activities are proposed to be implemented.**

- Establish a farm-to-farm pilgrimage path across the country to promote the interaction between farmers and non-agricultural/urban) citizens.
- Establish a food forest with nut trees to combine landscape management and food production.
- Learn how to organise the division of labour to have more time for envisioning the future of the business while ensuring a correct and inspiring personnel management style.
- Promote the inclusion of women in territorial rural and agricultural development at the regional level.
- Inform and engage farm visitors in the nature-inclusive management of agriculture to change the current negative narrative of farming.
- Engaging in improving the Dutch landscape by combining rewilding with offering temporary space for communities living in tiny houses close to nature.
- Developing new activities on the dairy farm that combine tourism and information about agricultural production methods.



Our group comprises a mix of (organic and conventional) farmers and nature enthusiasts, who all come with extra skills in their background, such as veterinary, accountancy, mentoring, management, social welfare, marketing, policy, and entrepreneurial skills. Some are already working on their project, whereas others are at the beginning of their journey. All are very supportive of one another and willingly share their networks and feedback.

Most participants are parents, and all are worried about future issues such as the changing Dutch landscape, farming-related sectors and environmental sustainability. Most women are also in a relationship and/or business partnership with a male farmer.

To provide our group with the most needed advice and targeted guidance, we invite stakeholders specialising in finance, law, coaching, family engagement, and women with existing entrepreneurial businesses.

